RESEARCH PLAN PROPOSAL

Reinterpretation of Myths from the *Mahabharata*, with special reference to Selected Plays by 20th Century Indian Writers

For registration to the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Research Problem

Myths are stories that are based on tradition. Myths are sacred tales that explains the world and man's experience. It is a religious story which involves the existence and activities of a supernatural being such as a god, a goddess and several such entities. Myth is derived from the Greek word "MYTHOS" means a story or word.

Myth has been fascinating writers from a very long time. People have been using myth in different areas. From a vey long period writers have been exploring myth religiously, morally, ethically and socially.

In my thesis I propose to analyze some selected myths in Mahabharata in contemporary scenario. I have taken four plays inspired from Mahabharata for my area of research. They are:

Five lords yet none a protector of timeless tales –by Mitra Saoli

(Translated by Rita Dutta, Ipshita Chanda, Maushami Bhowmik**)**

Andha Yug –by Dharamvir Bharati

Yayati –by Girish karnad

Sanjivani –by Adya Rangacharya

(Translated by Usha Desai)

Each play has been situationalized differently and tries to show the picture of society of that time. Lot of work has been done on these texts individually but none of the researchers have taken these five texts together.

The chief questions I will investigate are: What is representation? Does gender play a part in handling a dharamyudha? What is dramatics, ethics, morality? What is a myth? What makes Mahabharata an epic? Was it a dharamyudha? What were the concepts of patriarchy, gender issues, motherhood, fatherhood and gandharva vivah, in these five plays? How are these myths relevant to contemporary social reality?

I hypothesize that how myth has been contextualized in the contemporary literature, the way it has been used as a sub plot. The story interwoven does not change the actual meaning of the epic.

In testing my hypothesis, I will consider the comments and response of the writers and critics.

Definition of terms:-

Myth: Myth is derived from the Greek word “MYTHOS” which means story or word. Myths are symbolic tales of the distant past that concern cosmology and cosmogony. Myths articulate how characters undergo or inact an ordered sequence of events.

Mythology: It is a set of stories or beliefs about a particular person, institution or situation. It refers to a study of myths or to a body or a collection of myths.

Patriarchy: Patriarchy is the term used to describe the society in which we live. It is a social system characterized by current and historic unequal power relations between women and men where women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed.

Feminism: It is a collection of movements which aimed at establishing and defending equal political, social and economic rights for women.

Oral Tradition: The spoken relation or preservation, from one generation to the next, of a people’s cultural history and ancestry, often by a storyteller in a narrative form.

Ethics: Ethics is a branch of philosophy that includes the basic concepts and fundamental principles of right human conduct. It includes study of universal values as the essential equality of men and women.

Background

The Indian literature is incomplete without the myths and the mythological stories. These stories teach the ethical values, customs and rituals to every person. This is the reason why, not only Indian writers but foreign writers also use myth in their stories. Many people have worked on myth. Stories from Mahabharata have been used for the interpretation of myth. The epic tells about the scenario of that age but the stories concerned shows an individual's point of view. These stories, plays, reflect upon the feelings of a person. The writer uses myth to describe the situations and conditions of that particular time.

Review of literature

Mahabharata itself was a dharamyudha. These plays are a means of looking at the epic from a character's point of view.

Mitra saoli's *Five Lords yet none a Protector of Timeless Tales* narrates the story of draupadi, married to five royal pandava brothers and her humiliation at the hands of the kauravas, the cousins of her husbands and the rivals for the throne. It is a one woman performance with only a woman's voice.

Dharamvir bharati's *Andha Yug* is the play set in the last day of the Mahabharata, the five act play shows violence, destruction of human lives, moral and ethical values, selfhood and that war dehumanizes society and the individual. It shows fatalities and the after loss of war. It depicts that even god was not able to stop the massive massacre. The play ends with the death of Krishna.

Chandra rajan's *The Loom of Time* is the collection of three works of kalidasa *Meghadootam, Rtusamharam andAbijnanasakuntalam.*Taken together it portrays the character of a rishi's daughter Shakuntala. Her marriage with a king, then due to a curse on her, the king forgets her, and the reunion of the couple has been told in the form of poem. Abijnanasakuntalam has sexuality, lust and passion of love and the emotional bond of a lover. It is a blend of human desires and feelings.

Girish karnad's *Yayati* is an episode called *"Adiparva"*in the Mahabharata. But he had not exactly portrayed the characters as they were in the epic. It is the story of a king who, for the fulfillment of his sexual desires exchanges his old age with his son's youth. Karnad made slight changes in the myth, added some characters, portrayed the character of the king as a lustrous man who just want to fulfill his sexual desires at any cost. This shows the influence of the patriarchal society where a father orders his son to sacrifice his young age so that he could enjoy his sexuality. But in the epic he understands the nature of desires that they are endless, when one is fulfilled the next one comes. In the play he has introduced the character of Chitralekha who was Puru's wife. He has altered the story so as to give it a contemporary appeal.

Adya Rangacharya's *Sanjivani* is a mythological play which narrates the desire of the Devas and the Asuras for the Sanjivani. It shows that everyone wants to be immortal whether a king or a guru. Whether Shukracharya or Kacha, Devyani or Sharmishtha everyone wants Sanjivani for them. This play focuses on the perception of love and value systems in the contemporary life. It is the combination of myth and reality.

The Great Indian Novel by Shashi Tharoor is an excellent example of myth from Mahabharata. It is a satirical novel that compares the after independence political scenario with Mahabharata. Figures from Indian history are transformed into characters from mythology. In this novel the writer recasts the story of the nascent Indian democracy as a struggle between groups and individuals closely related by their personal and political histories.Gangaji's attending the round table conference, Ved Vyas describing the divisions in Indian society, Rabindranath Tagore returning his knighthood are some of the incidents which are interwoven with the characters of Mahabharata.

The Stone Women by Shashi Deshpande is a collection of short stories. She has taken women characters from Mahabharata. Draupadi, Kunti, Amba, Gandhari are the icons of Indian mythology. These mythical characters have been subjected to the contemporary period and

reinterpret the roles that a woman plays in her life. She is a daughter, a wife, a mother and a mistress. I have taken the story of Kunti called "*Hear me Sanjay"* .Kunti was hailed for not protesting against pandu's overwhelming love for madri as also for being a mute spectator to the unfair behaviors of the kauravas towards the pandavas. The story is the outpour of her feelings. Her desire for self assertion resulted in the protest for regaining her lost identity. It is in the sense that she achieves her right place in the humanity.

Shivaji Sawant's *Mritunjay* is the novel written in Marathi. It is a book in which karna; the son of Kunti has been spotlighted. He was a great warrior. In the battle between kauravas and the pandavas he fought from the side of Duryodhana for the sake of his friendship. He was the illegitimate son of Kunti, grown up by a charioteer. It is a novel in which the writer investigates the meaning of life from the point of view of a Mahabharata's character. The writer depicts a supernatural connection between Krishna and karna in this novel. He investigates karna from a more than human emancipation to offset the un-heroic and even unmanly acts which mar this fascinating creation of Vyas.

Dharamsankat by Mukund Lat is an excellent book for finding answers to the questions about dharma. It depicts that stories are the basis to find about any dharma. That is why very few philosophers have written

about dharma. But in this novel the thought resides with the early established notions of Mahabharata. The novel is a masterpiece as it contains a lot about the shastras. The Upanishads, Gita, Mahabharata are interwoven in the story so perfectly that they become a part of the myth and a new side of the set norms comes out. Confusion about religion comes due to the comparison between different religions which resulted in the problem for religion itself. In this novel the writer has focused on the problem of religious differences and on the basis of religion which have never been talked before. This novel is a great work from the philosophical thought also.

The Myth of the Eternal Return by Mircea Eliade is an essay which tells about the history of religion. It compels the religious expressions and activities of a wide variety of classical age and primitive religious cultures. While acknowledging that the return to the classical period is not possible, Eliade insists on the value of understanding this view in order to enrich our contemporary imagination of what is to be human.

Bali and the Ocean of Milk by Nilanjan .P. Choudhury has been derived from an old myth of the Hurrian civilization, which traces its origin on the banks of the river Euphrates in the northern Mesopotamia. The story is about two rulers Indrah and Bali who were cursed of death and both of them wants amrit, the mythical nectar. To get it, both the

Devas and the Asuras have to come together to cooperate and churn the ocean of milk. This book reimagines the eternal conflict between the Gods and the Asuras. It is a book with a modern political twist and a cocktail of mythology and politics.

Yajnaseni by Pratibha Ray is the story of draupadi. It has a feminist approach which deals with the life of a woman who has been suffering throughout her life by lust- blinded men, even in the presence of highly qualified and respectable people. Because of the mistake of her mother in law she had to marry five brothers. Despite of her sacrifice and dedication she was mistreated and her husbands did not say anything.

This novel begins with her life ending period. Through the flashback narrative technique the writer is trying to show the self awareness of a woman. Yajnaseni is the representative of the woman's sufferings and miseries in a patriarchal society.

The Puffin Mahabharata by Namita Gokhale is yet another mythical story of Mahabharata. She has presented the battle in a different perspective. The story of Mahabharata is about defeat as much as victory, about humility as much as courage. She has tried to maintain a balance between the characters of Bhima and Duryodhana as well as Dushasana. She takes the story to the bitter end culminating not in the

victory but its aftermath thereby leaving the reader with a sense of the futility of war, deprived of access to such power.

Research Methodology

My research methodology would consist of close reading, reinterpreting and in depth analysis of primary sources of contemporary writers. I will support my study by reinterpreting

psychological, ethical, moral and social issues. My research work will also take into consideration existing critical material in this area. My approach will be gender based.

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